if SCIENCE FICTION

JULY 1961 • 35 CENTS

A TASTE OF TENURE

BY GORDON R. DICKSON

The Real Hard Sell

William W. Stuart

Published: 1961

Type(s): Short Fiction, Science Fiction
Source: http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/31038

Also available on Feedbooks for Stuart:

- *Inside John Barth* (1960)

Copyright: Please read the legal notice included in this e-book and/or check the copyright status in your country.

Note: This book is brought to you by Feedbooks.
http://www.feedbooks.com
Strictly for personal use, do not use this file for commercial purposes.

Transcriber's note:

This story was published in *If: Worlds of Science Fiction*, July 1961. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.

BEN TILMAN sat down in the easiest of all easy chairs. He picked up a magazine, flipped pages; stood up, snapped fingers; walked to the view wall, walked back; sat down, picked up the magazine.

He was waiting, near the end of the day, after hours, in the lush, plush waiting room—"The customer's ease is the Sales Manager's please"—to see the Old Man. He was fidgety, but not about something. About nothing. He was irritated at nobody, at the world; at himself.

He was irritated at himself because there was no clear reason for him to be irritated at anything.

There he sat, Ben Tilman, normally a cheerful, pleasant young man. He was a salesman like any modern man and a far better salesman than most. He had a sweet little wife, blonde and pretty. He had a fine, husky two-year-old boy, smart, a real future National Sales Manager. He loved them both. He had every reason to be contented with his highly desirable, comfortable lot.

And yet he had been getting more sour and edgy ever since about six months after the baby came home from the Center and the novelty of responsibility for wife and child had worn off. He had now quit three jobs, good enough sales jobs where he was doing well, in a year. For no reason? For petty, pointless reasons.

With Ancestral Insurance, "Generations of Protection," he'd made the Billion Dollar Club—and immediately begun to feel dissatisfied with it—just before cute, sexy, blonde Betty had suddenly come from nowhere into his life and he had married her. That had helped, sure. But as soon after that as he had started paying serious attention to his job again, he was fed up with it. "Too much paper work. All those forms. It's work for a robot, not a man," he'd told Betty when he quit. A lie. The paper work was, as he looked back on it, not bad at all; pleasant even, in a way. It was just—nothing. Anything.

Indoor-Outdoor Climatizers—sniffles, he said, kept killing his sales presentation even though his record was good enough. Ultra-sonic toothbrushes, then, were a fine product. Only the vibration, with his gold inlay, seemed to give him headaches after every demonstration. He didn't *have* a gold inlay. But the headaches were real enough. So he quit.

So now he had a great new job with a great organization, Amalgamated Production for Living—ALPRODLIV. He was about to take on his first big assignment.

For that he had felt a spark of the old enthusiasm and it had carried him into working out a bright new sales approach for the deal tonight.

The Old Man himself had taken a personal interest, which was a terrific break. And still Ben Tilman felt that uneasy dissatisfaction. Damn.

"Mr. Robb will see you now, Mr. Tilman," said the cool robot voice from the Elec-Sec Desk. It was after customer hours and the charming human receptionist had gone. The robot secretary, like most working robots, was functional in form—circuits and wires, mike, speaker, extension arms to type and to reach any file in the room, wheels for intra-office mobility.

"Thanks, hon," said Ben. Nevertheless, robot secretaries were all programmed and rated female—and it was wise to be polite to them. After all, they could think and had feelings. There were a lot of important things they could do for a salesman—or, sometimes, not do. This one, being helpful, stretched out a long metal arm to open the door to the inner office for Ben. He smiled his appreciation and went in.

THE Old Man, Amalgamated's grand old salesman, was billiard bald, aging, a little stout and a little slower now. But he was still a fine sales manager. He sat at his huge, old fashioned oak desk as Ben walked across the office.

"Evening, sir." No response. Louder, "Good evening, Mr. Robb. Mr. Robb, it's Ben, sir. Ben Tilman. You memo'd me to come—" Still no sign. The eyes, under the great, beetling brows, seemed closed.

Ben grinned and reached out across the wide desk toward the small, plastic box hanging on the Old Man's chest. The Old Man glanced up as Ben tapped the plastic lightly with his fingernail.

"Oh, Ben. It's you." The Old Man raised his hand to adjust the ancient style hearing aid he affected as Ben sank into a chair. "Sorry Ben. I just had old Brannic Z-IX in here. A fine old robot, yes, but like most of that model, long-winded. So—" He gestured at the hearing aid.

Ben smiled. Everyone knew the Old Man used that crude old rig so he could pointedly tune out conversations he didn't care to hear. Any time you were talking to him and that distant look came into his half closed eyes, you could be sure that you were cut off.

"Sorry, Ben. Well now. I simply wanted to check with you, boy. Everything all set for tonight?"

"Well, yes, sir. Everything is set and programmed. Betty and I will play it all evening for the suspense, let them wonder, build it up—and then, instead of the big pitch they'll be looking for, we'll let it go

easy."

"A new twist on the old change-up. Ben, boy, it's going to go. I feel it. It's in the air, things are just ripe for a new, super-soft-sell pitch. Selling you've got to do by feel, eh Ben? By sales genius and the old seat of the pants. Good. After tonight I'm going all out, a hemisphere-wide, thirty day campaign. I'll put the top sales artist of every regional office on it. They can train on your test pattern tapes. I believe we can turn over billions before everybody picks up the signal and it senilesces. You give an old man a new faith in sales, Ben! You're a *salesman*."

"Well, sir—" But the Old Man's knack with the youthful-enthusiasm approach was contagious. For the moment Ben caught it and he felt pretty good about the coming night's work. He and Betty together would put the deal over. That would be something.

Sure it would…

"How do you and your wife like the place, Ben?" It was some place, for sure, the brand new house that Amalgamated had installed Ben, Betty and Bennie in the day after he had signed up.

"It's—uh—just fine, sir. Betty likes it very much, really. We both do." He hoped his tone was right.

"Good, Ben. Well, be sure to stop by in the morning. I'll have the tapes, of course, but I'll want your analysis. Might be a little vacation bonus in it for you, too."

"Sir, I don't know how to thank you."

The Old Man waved a hand. "Nothing you won't have earned, my boy. Robots can't sell." That was the set dismissal.

"Yes, sir. Robots can't manage sales, or—" He winked. The Old Man chuckled. An old joke was never too old for the Old Man. The same old bromides every time; and the same hearty chuckle. Ben left on the end of it.

DIALING home on his new, Company-owned, convertible soar-kart, he felt not too bad. Some of the old lift in spirits came as the kart-pilot circuits digested the directions, selected a route and zipped up into a north-north-west traffic pattern. The Old Man was a wonderful sales manager and boss. The new house-warming pitch that he and Betty would try tonight was smart. He could feel he had done something.

Exercising his sales ability with fair success, he fed himself this pitch all along the two hundred mile, twenty-minute hop home from the city. The time and distance didn't bother him. "Gives me time to

think," he had told Betty. Whether or not this seemed to her an advantage, she didn't say. At least she liked the place, "Amalgamated'sCountry Gentleman Estate—Spacious, Yet fully Automated."

"We are," the Old Man told Ben when he was given the Company-assigned quarters, "starting a new trend. With the terrific decline in birth rate during the past 90 to 100 years, you'll be astonished at how much room there is out there. No reason for everyone to live in the suburban centers any more. With millions of empty apartments in them, high time we built something else, eh? Trouble with people today, no initiative in obsolescing. But we'll move them."

Home, Ben left the kart out and conveyed up the walk. The front door opened. Betty had been watching for him. He walked to the family vueroom, as usual declining to convey in the house. The hell with the conveyor's feelings, if so simple a robot really had any. He *liked* to walk.

"Color pattern," Betty ordered the vuescreen as he came in, "robot audio out." With people talking in the house it was still necessary to put the machines under master automatic and manual control. Some of the less sophisticated robots might pick up some chance phrase of conversation and interpret it as an order if left on audio.

"Ben," said Betty, getting up to meet him, "you're late."

Ben was too good a salesman to argue that. Instead, he took her in his arms and kissed her. It was a very good sixty seconds later that she pushed him away with a severeness destroyed by a blush and a giggle to say, "Late but making up for lost time, huh? And sober, too. You must be feeling good for a change."

"Sure—and you feel even better, sugar." He reached for her again. She slipped away from him, laughing, but his wrist tel-timer caught on the locket she always wore, her only memento from her parents, dead in the old moon-orb crash disaster. She stood still, slightly annoyed, as he unhooked and his mood was, not broken, but set back a little. "What's got into you tonight anyway, Ben?"

"Oh, I don't know. Did I tell you, the O.M. may give us a vacation? Remember some of those nights up at that new 'Do It Yourself' Camp last summer?"

"Ben!" She blushed, smiled. "We won't get any vacation if we blow our house-warming pitch tonight, you know. And we have three couples due here in less than a half hour. Besides, I have to talk to you about Nana."

"THAT damned new CD-IX model. Now what?"

"She's very upset about Bennie. I'm not sure I blame her. This afternoon he simply refused his indoctrination. All the time he should have been playing store with Playmate he insisted on *drawing* things—himself, mind you, not Playmate. On the walls, with an old pencil of yours he found someplace in your things. Nana couldn't do a thing with him. She says you've got to give him a spanking."

"Why me? Why not you?"

"Now Ben, we've been over that and over it. Discipline is the father's job."

"Well, I won't do it. Bennie's just a baby. Let him do a few things himself. Won't hurt him."

"Ben!"

"That Nana is an officious busybody, trying to run our lives."

"Oh, Ben! You know Nana loves little Bennie. She only wants to help him."

"But to what?"

"She'd never dream of lifting a finger against Bennie no matter what he did. And she lives in terror that he'll cut her switch in some temper tantrum."

"Hmph! Well, I'm going up right now and tell her if I hear another word from her about spanking Bennie, I'll cut her switch myself. Then she can go back to Central for reprogramming and see how she likes it."

"Ben! You wouldn't."

"Why not? Maybe she needs a new personality?"

"You won't say a thing to her. You're too soft-hearted."

"This time I won't be."

This time he wasn't. He met Nana CD-IX in the hallway outside Bennie's room. Like all nurse, teaching, and children's personal service robots, she was human in form, except for her control dial safely out of baby's reach, top, center.

The human form was reassuring to children, kept them from feeling strange with parents back. Nana was big, gray-haired, stout, buxom, motherly, to reassure parents.

"Now, Mr. Tilman," she said with weary impatience, "you are too late. Surely you don't intend to burst in and disturb your son now."

"Surely I do."

"But he is having his supper. You will upset him. Can't you understand that you should arrange to be here between 5:30 and 6 if you wish to interview the child?"

"Did he miss me? Sorry, I couldn't make it earlier. But now I am going to see him a minute."

"Mr. Tilman!"

"Nana! And what's this about your wanting Bennie spanked because he drew a few pictures?"

"Surely you realize these are the child's formative years, Mr. Tilman. He should be learning to think in terms of selling now—not *doing* things. That's robot work, Mr.Tilman. Robots can't sell, you know, and what will people, let alone robots think if you let your boy grow up—"

"HE's growing up fine; and I am going in to see him."

"Mr. Tilman!"

"*And* for two credits, Nana, I'd cut your switch. You hear me?"

"Mr. Tilman—no! No, please. I'm sorry. Let the boy scrawl a bit; perhaps it won't hurt him. Go in and see him if you must, but do try not to upset him or— All right, all right. But please Mr. Tilman, my switch—"

"Very well Nana. I'll leave it. This time."

"Thank you, Mr. Tilman."

"So we understand each other, Nana. Though, matter of fact, I'm hanged if I ever did quite see why you senior-level robots get so worked up about your identities."

"Wouldn't you, Mr. Tilman?"

"Of course. But—well, yes, I suppose I do see, in a way. Let's go see Bennie-boy."

So Ben Tilman went into the nursery and enjoyed every second of a fast fifteen-minute roughhouse with his round-faced, laughing, chubby son and heir. No doubt it was very bad, just after supper. But Nana, with a rather humanly anxious restraint, confined herself to an unobtrusive look of disapproval.

He left Bennie giggling and doubtless upset, at least to a point of uneagerness for Nana's bedtime story about Billie the oldtime newsboy, who sold the Brooklyn Bridge.

So then he was run through a fast ten-minute shower, shave and change by Valet. He floated downstairs just as Betty came out of the

cocktail lounge to say, “Code 462112 on the approach indicator. Must be the Stoddards. They always get every place first, in time for an extra drink.”

“Fred and Alice, yes. But damn their taste for gin, don’t let Barboy keep the cork in the vermouth all evening. I like a touch of vermouth. I wonder if maybe Ishouldn’t—”

“No, you shouldn’t mix the cocktails yourself and scandalize everybody. You know perfectly well Barboy really does do better anyway.”

“Well, maybe. Everything all set, hon? Sorry I was late.”

“No trouble here. I just fed Robutler the base program this morning and spent the rest of the day planning my side of our Sell. How to tantalize the girls, pique the curiosity without giving it away. But you know—” she laughed a little ruefully—“I sort of miss not having even the shopping to do. Sometimes it hardly seems as though you need a wife at all.”

Ben slid an arm around her waist. “Selling isn’t the only thing robots can’t do, sugar.” He pulled her close.

“Ben! They’re at the door.”

They were, and then in the door, oh-ing and ah-ing over this and that. And complimenting Barboy on the martinis. Then the Wilsons came and the Bartletts and that was it.

“Three couples will be right,” Ben had analyzed it. “Enough so we can let them get together and build up each others’ curiosity but not too many for easy control. People that don’t know us so well they might be likely to guess the gimmick. We’ll let them stew all evening while they enjoy the Country Gentleman House-Warming hospitality. Then, very casually, we toss it out and let it lie there in front of them. They will be sniffing, ready to nibble. The clincher will drive them right in. I’d stake my sales reputation on it.” If it matters a damn, he added. But silently.

They entertained three couples at their house-warming party. It was a delightful party, a credit to Ben, Betty and the finest built-in house robots the mind of Amalgamated could devise.

By ten o’clock they had dropped a dozen or more random hints, but never a sales pitch. Suspense was building nicely when Betty put down an empty glass and unobtrusively pushed the button to cue Nana. Perfect timing. They apologized to the guests, “We’re ashamed to be so old-fashioned but we feel better if we look in on the boy when he wakes in the night. It keeps him from forgetting us.”

Then they floated off upstairs together, ostensibly to see Nana and

little Bennie.

Fred Stoddard: “Some place they have here, eh? Off-beat. A little too advanced for my taste, this single dwelling idea, but maybe—Ben sure must have landed something juicy with Amalgamated to afford this. What the devil is he pushing, anyway?”

Scoville Wilson (shrug): “Beats me. You know, before dinner I cornered him at the bar to see if I could slip in a word or two of sell. Damned if he didn’t sign an order for my Cyclo-sell Junior Tape Library without even a C level resistance. Then he talked a bit about the drinks and I thought sure he was pushing that new model Barboy. I was all set to come back with a sincere ‘think it over’—and then he took a bottle from the Barboy, added a dash of vermouth to his drink and walked off without a word of sell. He always was an odd one.”

Lucy Wilson (turns from woman talk with the other two wives): “Oh no! I knew it wasn’t the Barboy set. They wouldn’t have him set so slow. Besides didn’t you hear the way she carried on about the nursery and that lovely Nana? That must have been a build-up, but Ben goofed his cue to move in on Sco and me for a close. Doesn’t Amalgamated handle those nurseries?”

Tom Bartlett: “Amalgamated makes almost anything. That’s the puzzle. I dunno—but it must be something big. He has to hit us with something, doesn’t he?”

Belle Bartlett: “Who ever heard of a party without a sell?”

Nancy Stoddard: “Who ever heard of a party going past ten without at least a warm-up pitch? And Betty promised Fred to send both Ben and Bennie to the Clinic for their Medchecks. You know we have the newest, finest diagnosticians—”

Fred Stoddard: “Nancy!”

Nancy Stoddard: “Oh, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be selling you folks at *their* party, should I? Come to think, you’re all signed with Fred anyway, aren’t you? Well, about Ben, *I* think—”

Lucy Wilson: “Sh-h-h! Here they come.”

SMILING, charming—and still not an order form in sight—Ben and Betty got back to their guests. Another half hour. Barboy was passing around with nightcaps. Lucy Wilson nervously put a reducegar to her sophisticated, peppermint-striped lips.

Quickly Ben Tilman was on his feet. He pulled a small, metal cylinder from his pocket with a flourish and held it out on his open palm toward Lucy. A tiny robot Statue of Liberty climbed from the

cylinder, walked across Ben's hand, smiled, curtsied and reached out to light the reducegar with her torch, piping in a high, thin voice, "Amalgamated reducegars are cooler, lighter, finer."

"Ben! How simply darling!"

"Do you like it? It's a new thing from Amalgamated NovelDiv. You can program it for up to a hundred selective sell phrases, audio or visio key. Every salesman should have one. Makes a marvelous gift, and surprisingly reasonable."

"So that's it, Ben. I just love it!"

"Good! It's yours, compliments of Amalgamated."

"But—then you're not selling them? Well, what on earth—?"

"Damn it, Ben," Fred Stoddard broke in, "come on, man, out with it. What in hell*are* you selling? You've given us the shakes. What is it? The Barboy set? It's great. If I can scrape up the down payment, I'll—"

"*After* we furnish a nursery with a decent Nana, Fred Stoddard," Nancy snapped, "and get a second soar-kart. Ben isn't selling Barboys anyway, are you. Ben? It *is*that sweet, sweet Nana, isn't it? And I do want one, the whole nursery, Playmate and all, girl-programmed of course, for our Polly."

"*Is* it the nursery, Betty?" Lucy pitched in her credit's worth. "Make him tell us, darling. We have enjoyed everything so much, the dinner, the Tri-deo, this whole lovely, lovely place of yours. Certainly the house warming has been perfectly charming."

"And that's it," said Ben smiling, a sheaf of paper forms suddenly in his hand.

"What? Not—?"

"The house, yes. Amalgamated's Country Gentleman Estate, complete, everything in it except Bennie, Betty and me. Your equity in your Center co-op can serve as down payment, easy three-generation terms, issue insurance. Actually, I can show you how, counting in your entertainment, vacation, incidental, and living expenses, the Country Gentleman will honestly cost you less."

"Ben!"

"How simply too clever!"

Ben let it rest there. It was enough. Fred Stoddard, after a short scuffle with Scoville Wilson for the pen, signed the contract with a flourish. Sco followed.

"There!"

"There now, Ben," said Betty, holding Bennie a little awkwardly in

her arms in the soar-kart. They had moved out so the Stoddards could move right in. Now they were on their way in to their reserved suite at Amalgamated's Guest-ville. "You were absolutely marvellous. Imagine selling all three of them!"

"There wasn't anything to it, actually."

"Ben, how can you say that? Nobody else could have done it. It was a sales masterpiece. And just think. Now salesmen all over the hemisphere are going to follow your sales plan. Doesn't it make you proud? Happy? Ben, you aren't going to be like *that* again?"

No, of course he wasn't. He was pleased and proud. Anyway, the Old Man would be, and that, certainly, was something. A man had to feel good about winning the approval of Amalgamated's grand Old Man. And it did seem to make Betty happy.

But the actual selling of the fool house and even the two other, identical houses on the other side of the hill—he just couldn't seem to get much of a glow over it. He had done it; and what had he done? It was the insurance and the toothbrushes all over again, and the old nervous, sour feeling inside.

"At least we do have a vacation trip coming out of it, hon. The O.M. practically promised it yesterday, if our sell sold. We could—"

"—go back to that queer new 'Do It Yourself' camp up on the lake you insisted on dragging me to the last week of our vacation last summer. Ben, really!" He *was* going to be like that. She knew it.

"Well, even you admitted it was some fun."

"Oh, sort of, I suppose. For a little while. Once you got used to the whole place without one single machine that could think or do even the simplest little thing by itself. So, well, almost like being savages. Do you think it would be safe for Bennie? We can't watch him all the time, you know."

"People used to manage in the old days. And remember those people, the Burleys, who were staying up there?"

"That queer, crazy bunch who went there for a vacation when the Camp was first opened and then just stayed? Honestly, Ben! Surely you're not thinking of—"

"Oh, nothing like that. Just a vacation. Only—"

Only those queer, peculiar people, the Burleys had seemed so relaxed and cheerful. Grandma and Ma Burley cleaning, washing, cooking on the ancient electric stove; little Donnie, being a nuisance, poking at the keys on his father's crude, manual typewriter, a museum piece; Donnie and his brothers wasting away childhood digging and piling sand on the beach, paddling a boat and actually building a play

house. It was mad. People playing robots. And yet, they seemed to have a wonderful time while they were doing it.

"But how do you keep staying here?" he had asked Buck Burley, "Why don't they put you out?"

"Who?" asked Buck. "How? Nobody can sell me on leaving. We like it here. No robot can force us out. Here we are. Here we stay."

THEY pulled into the Guest-ville ramp. Bennie was fussy; the nursery Nana was strange to him. On impulse, Betty took him in to sleep in their room, ignoring the disapproving stares of both the Nana and the Roboy with their things.

They were tired, let down. They went to bed quietly.

In the morning Betty was already up when Ben stumbled out of bed. "Hi," she said, nervously cheerful. "The house Nanas all had overload this morning and I won't stand for any of those utility components with Bennie. So I'm taking care of him myself."

Bennie chortled and drooled vita-meal at his high-chair, unreprimanded. Ben mustered a faint smile and turned to go dial a shave, cool shower and dress at Robather.

That done, he had a bite of breakfast. He felt less than top-sale, but better. Last night*had* gone well. The Old Man would give them a pre-paid vacation clearance to anyresort in the world or out. Why gloom?

He rubbed Bennie's unruly hair, kissed Betty and conveyed over from Guest-ville to office.

Message-sec, in tone respect-admiration A, told him the Old Man was waiting for him. Susan, the human receptionist in the outer office, favored him with a dazzling smile. There was a girl who could sell; and had a product of her own, too.

The Old Man was at his big, oak desk but, a signal honor, he got up and came half across the room to grab Ben's hand and shake it. "Got the full report, son. Checked the tapes already. That's selling, boy! I'm proud of you. Tell you what, Ben. Instead of waiting for a sales slack, I'm going to move you and that sweet little wife of yours right into a spanking new, special Country Gentleman unit I had in mind for myself. And a nice, fat boost in your credit rating has already gone down to accounting. Good? Good. Now, Ben, I have a real, artistic sales challenge that is crying for your talent."

"Sir? Thank you. But, sir, there is the matter of the vacation—"

"Vacation? Sure, Ben. Take a vacation anytime. But right now it seems to the Old Man you're on a hot selling streak. I don't want to

see you get off the track, son; your interests are mine. And wait till you get your teeth into this one. Books, Ben boy. Books! People are spending all their time sitting in on Tri-deo, not reading. People should read more, Ben. Gives them that healthy tired feeling. Now we have the product. We have senior Robo-writers with more circuits than ever before. All possible information, every conceivable plot. Maybe a saturation guilt type campaign to start—but it's up to you, Ben. I don't care how you do it, but move books."

"Books, eh? Well, now." Ben was interested. "Funny thing, sir, but that ties in with something I was thinking about just last night."

"You have an angle? Good boy!"

"Yes, sir. Well, it is a wild thought maybe, but last summer when I was on vacation I met a man up at that new camp and—well, I know it sounds silly, but he was writing a book."

"Nonsense!"

"Just what I thought, sir. But I read some of it and, I don't know, it had a sort of a feel about it. Something new, sir, it might catch on."

"All right, all right. That's enough. You're a salesman. You've sold me."

"On the book?" Ben was surprised.

"Quit pulling an old man's leg, Ben. I'm sold on your needing a vacation. I'll fill outyour vacation pass right now." The Old Man, still a vigorous, vital figure, turned and walked back to his Desk-sec. "Yes sir," said the secretarial voice, "got it. Vacation clearance for Tilman, Ben, any resort."

"And family," said Ben.

"And family. Very good, sir."

The Old Man made his sign on the pass and said heavily, "All right then, Ben. That's it. Maybe if you go back up to that place for a few days and see that psycho who was writing a book again, perhaps you'll realize how impractical it is."

"But sir! I'm serious about that book. It really did have—" he broke off.

The Old Man was sitting there, face blank, withdrawn. Ben could feel he wasn't even listening. That damned hearing aid of his. The Old Man had cut it off. Suddenly, unreasoningly, Ben was furious. He stood by the huge desk and he reached across toward the hearing aid on the Old Man's chest to turn up the volume. The Old Man looked up and saw Ben's hand stretching out.

A sudden look of fear came into his china blue, clear eyes but he

made no move. He sat frozen in his chair.

Ben hesitated a second. “What—?” But he didn’t have to ask. He knew.

And he also knew what he was going to do.

“No!” said the Old Man. “No, Ben. I’ve only been trying to help; trying to serve your best interests the best way I know. Ben, you mustn’t—”

But Ben moved forward.

HE took the plastic box on the Old Man’s chest and firmly cut the switch.

The Old Man, the Robot Old Man, went lifeless and slumped back in his chair as Ben stretched to cut off the Desk-sec. Then he picked up his vacation clearance.

“Robots can’t sell, eh?” he said to the dead machine behind the desk. “Well, you couldn’t sell me that time, could you, Old Man?”

Clumsily, rustily, Ben whistled a cheerful little off-key tune to himself. Hell, they could do anything at all—except sell.

“You can’t fool some of the people all of the time,” he remarked over his shoulder to the still, silent figure of the Old Man as he left the office, “it was a man said that.” He closed the door softly behind him.

Betty would be waiting.

Betty was waiting. Her head ached as she bounced Bennie, the child of Ben, of herself and of an unknown egg cell from an anonymous ovary, on her knees. Betty 3-RC-VIII, secret, wife-style model, the highest development of the art of Roboticshad known instantly when Ben cut the Old Man’s switch. She had half expected it. But it made her headache worse.

“But damn my programming!” She spoke abruptly, aloud, nervously fingering the locket around her neck. “Damn it and shift circuit. He’s right! He is my husband and he is right and I’m glad. I’m glad we’re going to the camp and I’m going to help him stay.”

After all, why shouldn’t a man want to do things just as much as a robot? He had energy, circuits, feelings too. She knew he did.

For herself, she loved her Ben and Bennie. But still just that wasn’t enough occupation. She was glad they were going to the new isolation compound for non-psychotic but unstable, hyper-active, socially dangerous individual humans. At the camp there would be things to do.

At the camp they would be happy.

All at once the headache that had been bothering her so these past months was gone. She felt fine and she smiled at little Bennie. “Bennie-boy,” she said, kissing his smooth, untroubled baby forehead. “Daddy’s coming.” Bennie laughed and started to reach for the locket around Mommy’s neck. But just then the door opened and he jumped down to run and meet his daddy.

END

Also available on Feedbooks

Moonfleet, *John Meade Falkner*

Moonfleet is a tale of smuggling by the English novelist J. Meade Falkner, first published in 1898. The book was extremely popular among children worldwide up until the 1970s, mostly for its themes of adventure and gripping storyline. It remains a popular story widely read and is still sometimes studied in schools.
The novel is set in a fishing village in Dorset during the mid 18th century. The story concerns a 15 year old orphan boy, John Trenchard, who becomes friends with an older man who turns out to be the leader of a gang of smugglers.

War and Peace, *Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy*

War and Peace is a novel by Leo Tolstoy, first published from 1865 to 1869 in Russkii Vestnik, which tells the story of Russian society during the Napoleonic Era. It is usually described as one of Tolstoy's two major masterpieces (the other being Anna Karenina) as well as one of the world's greatest novels.
War and Peace offered a new kind of fiction, with a great many characters caught up in a plot that covered nothing less than the grand subjects indicated by the title, combined with the equally large topics of youth, marriage, age, and death. Though it is often called a novel today, it broke so many conventions of the form that it was not considered a novel in its time. Indeed, Tolstoy himself considered Anna Karenina (1878) to be his first attempt at a novel in the European sense.

Sanin, *Mikhail Petrovich Artsybashev*

The hero of Artsybashev's novel exhibits a set of new values to be contrasted with the morality of the older Russian intelligentsia. Sanin is an attractive, clever, powerful, life-loving man who is, at the same time, an amoral and carnal animal, bored both by politics and by religion. During the novel he lusts after his own sister, but defends her when she is betrayed by an arrogant officer; he deflowers an innocent-but-willing virgin; and encourages a Jewish friend to end his self-doubts by committing suicide. Sanin's extreme individualism greatly appealed to young people in Russia during the twilight years of the Romanov regime. "Saninism" was marked by sensualism, self-gratification, and self-destruction--and gained in credibility in an atmosphere of moral and spiritual despondency.

Little Fuzzy, *Henry Beam Piper*

The chartered Zarathustra Company had it all their way. Their charter was for a Class III uninhabited planet, which Zarathustra was, and it meant they owned the planet lock stock and barrel. They exploited it, developed it and reaped the huge profits from it without interference from the Colonial Government. Then Jack Holloway, a sunstone prospector, appeared on the scene with his family of Fuzzies and the passionate conviction that they were not cute animals but little people.

The Road, *Jack London*

Tales of London's days as a hobo.

Madame Bovary, *Gustave Flaubert*

Madame Bovary scandalized its readers when it was first published in 1857. And the story itself remains as fresh today as when it was first written, a work that remains unsurpassed in its unveiling of character and society. It tells the tragic story of the romantic but empty-headed Emma Rouault. When Emma marries Charles Bovary, she imagines she will pass into the life of luxury and passion that she reads about in sentimental novels and women's magazines. But Charles is an ordinary country doctor, and provincial life is very different from the romantic excitement for which she yearns. In her quest to realize her dreams she takes a lover, Rodolphe, and begins a devastating spiral into deceit and despair. And Flaubert captures every step of this catastrophe with sharp-eyed detail and a wonderfully subtle understanding of human emotions.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, *Lyman Frank Baum*

Dorothy is a young girl who lives on a Kansas farm with her Uncle Henry, Aunt Em, and little dog Toto. One day the farmhouse, with Dorothy inside, is caught up in a tornado and deposited in a field in the country of the Munchkins. The falling house kills the Wicked Witch of the East.

Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions, *Edwin Abbott Abbott*

Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions is an 1884 science fiction novella by the English schoolmaster Edwin Abbott Abbott.
As a satire, Flatland offered pointed observations on the social hierarchy of Victorian culture. However, the novella's more enduring contribution is its examination of dimensions; in a foreword to one of

the many publications of the novella, noted science writer Isaac Asimov described Flatland as "The best introduction one can find into the manner of perceiving dimensions." As such, the novella is still popular amongst mathematics, physics and computer science students.

The Articles of Confederation, *Benjamin Franklin*

The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, commonly referred to as the Articles of Confederation, was the first constitution of the thirteen United States of America. The Second Continental Congress appointed a committee to draft the 'Articles' in June 1776 and proposed the draft to the States for ratification in November 1777. The ratification process was completed in March 1781, legally federating the sovereign and independent states, allied under the Articles of Association, into a new federation styled the "United States of America". Under the Articles the states retained sovereignty over all governmental functions not specifically relinquished to the central government.

The Divine Comedy, *Dante Alighieri*

Dante Alighieri's poetic masterpiece, The Divine Comedy, is a moving human drama, an unforgettable visionary journey through the infinite torment of Hell, up the arduous slopes of Purgatory, and on to the glorious realm of Paradise-the sphere of universal harmony and eternal salvation.

www.feedbooks.com
Food for the mind

Table of Contents

Title
About
Recommendations